

Come to LIFE this Easter Friday

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[0 : 00] a person with malicious and malevolent intent drove an aircraft at speed into the ground. There was no hope of survival. He calmly ended his own life.

He killed 149 other random people who got dressed that morning and boarded an aircraft that he was responsible to fly. He ignored the impassioned pleading and demands of the captain who was trying to rescue the situation.

He turned a deaf ear to the terrified screams of his passengers. It was an act of unspeakable evil. It was conceived in the mind of a person.

It was enacted with callous disregard for anybody else. And I don't think it sits easily with us as human beings this morning that another human being would carry out such wickedness.

What a horror that another person would disregard your life or mine. Today is Good Friday.

[1 : 09] We've just read John's account of the trial, crucifixion and burial of Jesus Christ. The ultimate expression of human evil.

And the scale of the act is defined by who the victim is. So if I was killed by a Viking gang bullet in Chatswood in the next couple of days, and may that not be true, it would be newsworthy for a couple of days, maybe even a week.

If it happened to Tony Abbott, it would be newsworthy for years. If it did happen to Jesus, and his death still matters this morning because of who he is.

John 19 verse 7 tells us that people want him dead because he made himself the son of God. His accusers are certain that Jesus was an imposter.

John tells us he is no imposter. He is God in the flesh. He is the real deal. When you read John's gospel, you don't read every bit of gore that the other gospels reveal.

[2 : 16] He tells us enough to reveal an act of unspeakable evil is being carried out. A plan which is conceived in the hearts of the religious aristocracy, the God-men, the men who controlled the temple and the worship of God's people.

And John lays out a series of carefully chosen signs to prove that Jesus is the son of God. The religious leaders have all seen those signs, and they have drawn their own conclusions.

And after Jesus lovingly raised Lazarus to life, the leaders just could not cope. They went into meltdown. Their whole religious view of the world was threatened.

And so they made a decision. We're going to kill Lazarus, and we're going to kill Jesus. In fact, Caiaphas, the high priest, said in John chapter 11, So the leaders determined that God's son would die.

You almost need to be an alien, somebody from outside this world, to understand just how evil this act is.

[3 : 59] There's a story of an alien who came to Earth, and he landed in Sydney, and he talked to a young couple in Pitt Street Mall, trying to understand where he was. And he said to them, Tell me something special about planet Earth.

And they said, Well, our cities emit so much light, they light up the sky, and they can be seen from the International Space Station. And the alien said, Well, I've just come from the Crab Nebula, which has a total luminosity of 75,000 times your sun.

Well, we've got aircraft that can travel up to five times the speed of sound. I've just travelled 4.2 light years from Alpha Centauri in the last 10 minutes.

Tell me something that's really special, that's different. And the couple stopped and they thought for a moment, the creator God of the universe came and visited us.

And the alien was wide-eyed in amazement. We've never met our creator. What was he like? When did he come?

[5 : 19] What did he do? What's happened to him? And the Aussie couple dropped their eyes to the ground and they said, We killed him.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the ultimate expression of human evil. It is an act where we are completely and utterly culpable and we have no defence and no one else to blame. But the really strange, if not amazing thing, is that despite our malevolence, God was achieving an act of unfathomable love.

Jesus is never out of control. He voluntarily gave himself to God's mission in the Garden of Gethsemane. He knew the dread, but he also trusted his Father for the good that would be achieved.

Father, take this cup from me, but not my will, but yours be done. And in the trial before Pilate, James has already said this morning, but Pilate says, Do you refuse to speak to me?

[6 : 48] Do you realise that I have power either to free you or to crucify you? And Jesus answered, You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.

See, there is a much bigger play going on here than what is merely happening at a human level. These events have been anticipated for more than a thousand years. When the soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothing, John sees that as the fulfilment of Psalm 22.

When the soldiers pierced his side and didn't break his legs, John sees that as the fulfilment of Numbers 9 and Psalm 34, where the Passover lamb was not to have any of its bones broken. In verse 28, Jesus knew that everything was accomplished. He fulfilled Psalm 69 by receiving sour wine. And in Psalm 69, if you read that in detail, you see that the afflicted one is actually setting a table that will become a snare to his enemies.

John is very careful not to say that Jesus died. Yes, he did die, but he's very careful not to say it. He tells us that he gave up his spirit. He relinquished his life.

[8 : 04] He yielded himself to death. Life was not taken from him. And even as he dies, he is exercising control over his circumstances. Seems ridiculous.

A condemned man in control, even as he dies, and then he dies with this triumphant cry, it is finished. It's finished.

I've run the race before me. Mission accomplished. And straight away, my mind goes back to John 12, where Jesus says, now is the time for judgment on this world, and now the prince of this world will be driven out, but I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

C.S. Lewis draws a dramatic picture of the crucifixion in the line, the witch, and the wardrobe. The hounds of hell and every baying creature of evil are salivating at the demise of the lion king, Aslan. And he humbly and nobly walks into their domain and into their abode. They scream for his blood. They go berserk with joy as the wicked queen drives a dagger into his heart.

[9 : 16] And at the very moment when evil seems to have totally triumphed, God wins a magnificent victory and evil does not even know that it is defeated.

Now is the time for judgment on this world. Now the prince of this world will be driven out, but I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

The crucifixion of Jesus is a divine drama which is played out in a heavenly realm. Satan throws every bit of malevolence that he can muster at God, and God stares him down and he responds with the most amazing sacrificial love.

He trumps evil with love. So this is not cosmic child abuse. This is God, the Son, stepping up to the mark and ripping Satan's domain away from him with great power.

And our great enemy's sin and death totally defeated, conquered in such a way that we can be forgiven and safe with Jesus forever and ever and ever. John told us near the beginning what this was all about.

[10 : 41] John 3.16, For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life.

The mission of God is driven by his love for us. Jesus went to his death trusting his Father for victory. When he raised Lazarus, he said, I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me will live even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. This great drama, the crucifixion of Jesus, is a very personal expression of God's love for you and also for me.

Hopefully, none of us will ever do anything as unspeakably evil as the German pilot did last week. But evil is still personal and it's at hand in all of us and it's seen any time that we say to God, stay

out of my life, it becomes an expression of rejecting our creator.

it is ultimately an expression of evil. Leave me alone. I don't want God interfering in my relationships. Leave me alone.

[12:09] I have my own plan. Leave me alone. I don't want to say sorry to anybody even though I know I've hurt them. Leave me alone. It's my wealth. Leave me alone.

They're my possessions. It's a remarkable end to John 19. The resurrection hasn't yet happened. Come back on Sunday. But there's great grief and there is devastation for Jesus' followers. They can't see the end game yet. We can. But two believers come forward, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus and they're Pharisees.

They're Bible men. They're God men. They're members of the Jewish religious elite. And they have believed in Jesus in secret.

Nicodemus was the man who had come to Jesus clandestinely at night to suss him out. He wasn't bold back then but now he is emboldened. And these guys effectively out themselves.

[13:14] They show what they believe by their actions. And their response to the wickedness of Jesus' execution is to step forward and to identify with him and to stand effectively against this injustice which has just been done to him.

Their faith becomes public as they ask for Jesus' body and they bury him with great care and with great dignity. Friends, I don't know what brought you to church this morning but I'm really glad you're here.

We're glad you're here. I hope that you can see that there is something magnificent and triumphant in the darkness of Good Friday. This is not evil out of control.

Rather, the creator God of the universe stood in the midst of great evil. He stared it in the face with astonishing love. His love triumphed over evil.

And Jesus said in John 12, but I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. It's a wonderful expression where we see that God is not in the business of driving people away.

[14:34] He is standing with steadfast and unfathomable love and he is calling everybody to himself. He has seen the worst of our evil, the darkest recesses of our hearts and he has responded with love.

So you may have lived a very dark life running away from Christ and at the cross today he looks into your eyes with amazing love and he calls you to himself.

So friends, stop telling God to get out of your life. Turn to our wonderful Saviour King and thank him for drawing you near.

What a wonderful way to respond to the love of God today, this Good Friday. Amen.